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New Flood Forecasting Centre officially opened

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The new joint Environment Agency and Met Office Flood Forecasting Centre for England and Wales will be officially opened today by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Hilary Benn MP.

The Flood Forecasting Centre (FFC) has been created to forecast river and coastal flooding as well as extreme rainfall which may lead to flooding from surface water. It will help provide earlier warnings of floods to local authorities and the emergency services, to give them more time to prepare for floods and reduce the risk of loss of life and damage to property.

The new service will complement existing public flood warning arrangements from the Environment Agency and public weather warnings from the Met Office.

The creation of the centre is in response to a key recommendation of Sir Michael Pitt's Review into the Summer 2007 floods. The FFC combines the Environment Agency's expertise in flood risk management and the Met Office's expertise in weather forecasting for the first time.

The Environment Agency's Chief Executive, Dr Paul Leinster, commented: "The opening of the Flood Forecasting Centre marks the beginning of a new era for flood forecasting. Using the latest technology and working with our partners from the Met Office, we will continue to improve our ability to forecast flooding as the impacts of climate change take hold. We can't stop flooding entirely, however, the Flood Forecasting Centre will allow us to be even better prepared."

The Chief Executive of the Met Office, John Hirst, said: "Climate change is increasingly influencing our weather. The Met Office has accelerated its programme of research and development to improve our ability to accurately forecast extreme and, quite often, localised rainfall. We are now in a unique position to combine our skills with those of the Environment Agency to deliver real benefits to the UK."

Environment Agency website

Notes

- The new £10.4 million centre is operational 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and is based in Farringdon, London. It is funded by Defra (£5m), the Environment Agency (£4.9m), Welsh Assembly Government (£250,000) and the Met Office (£76,000) and employs a team totalling 26, including hydrologists, weather forecasters and support staff. The £10.4m refers to spending between October 2008 and March 2011 and includes the set up, operational costs and the delivery of the development programme.
- Members of the public should check their flood risk from rivers and the sea and sign up to the Environment Agency's free flood warning service by calling 0845 988 1188 or visiting www.environment-agency.gov.uk. The Met Office will also continue to issue weather warnings to the public via TV and radio broadcasts and on its website.